

S. 2017, Lines Interfere with National Elections (L.I.N.E.) Act
Senate Rules Committee Hearing
March 12, 2014, 9:45am, Russell 301
Senator Barbara Boxer - Testimony

Thank you Senators Schumer and Roberts, and all Committee members for this opportunity to discuss S. 2017, the Lines Interfere with National Elections – or LINE – Act of 2014.

The right to vote is the essence of our democracy, the gift our founders gave our citizens. But when you make people wait in line for hours – when you force them to choose between voting or caring for a sick child, or going through severe pain as they wait or risking their jobs as they wait – the right to participate in our democracy is fundamentally denied.

They say a picture is worth 1,000 words. Well, here is what we witnessed in states across the nation on Election Day 2012.

Take a look at this picture, which shows voters in Miami, Florida waiting for hours to vote. Blake Yagman said, “I was there for about three and a half hours. Each of the lines was about four to five hours. It took my mom eight and a half hours to vote.” He is severely hypoglycemic and spent several hours vomiting after standing in the sun for so long. Ultimately, he was not able to vote because the lines were too long.

And who can forget then-102-year-old Florida voter Desiline Victor, who waited in line for three hours to cast her ballot? She persevered until she got to the ballot box, but many gave up after hours of waiting.

Now this picture is of voters at College Park Elementary School in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Voters here waited for hours as well, and told heartbreaking stories.

At this very precinct, Virginia voter Mary Atkinson said, “Some of us have been out here four hours. I’ve been out here three and a half hours. I had knee surgery and my knee is killing me.”

Another Virginia voter, Robin Marohl, said, “I can’t tell you how many people I’ve counted leaving and saying, ‘The heck with it. I’m not going to vote, ‘ cause they can’t get in there.”

Unbelievably, many voters in Florida, Virginia and other states were still standing in line hours after the polls closed and into early Wednesday morning.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, we should not apply “survival of the fittest” to the right to vote. That is not what our founders envisioned.

When we force people to stand in line for hours, the right to vote becomes ephemeral.

That’s why Senator Nelson and I wrote the LINE Act.

Our bill helps implement the recommendation of the bipartisan Presidential Commission on Election Administration – which was chaired by the campaign lawyers for the Obama campaign and the Romney campaign – that no voter should have to wait in line longer than 30 minutes.

The LINE Act directs the Attorney General and the Election Assistance Commission, or the EAC, to identify voting jurisdictions where voters waited more than 30 minutes to cast a vote in a federal election.

The Attorney General and the EAC will then craft common-sense plans to minimize waiting times in those jurisdictions for the next federal election.

The LINE Act does not set rigid standards. Rather, the plans are tailored to each specific jurisdiction.

States will have one year and a half to certify that they have complied with the plans.

The goal is to bring experts together to fix the problems where they occurred.

Colleagues, this is not rocket science. Either we have the right to vote or we don't. Senator Nelson and I think the LINE Act is a very discreet fix to a devastating problem.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning, and for your consideration of this important legislation.